

and the local community. During site visits, significant natural features, such as rock outcrops, wetlands, and mature forest, were observed and field notes were taken regarding the vegetation composition and structure, the natural community and its condition, any rare species or potential habitat present, animal observations, and other site information. The location of these features was typically recorded with a GPS unit, and this information formed the basis of the site descriptions and maps in the second section of this document. A large portion of the information from public lands (particularly Gorges State Park, DuPont State Forest, and parts of the Pisgah National Forest) was already collected during previous surveys and has extensively been incorporated into these site descriptions as well.

SNHAs were mapped to include ecologically significant natural areas observed during field visits and to some degree interpolated from aerial photography. In many cases site maps were developed from previously existing SNHAs, with occasional additions reflecting recent field visits. The sites were then ranked according to a prescribed formula established by the N.C. NHP. SNHAs are ranked as being of National, State, Regional, or County significance, based on criteria such as the relative quality of the rare species populations or natural communities occurring in the site. The formal criteria are as follows:

National Significance: Sites considered to contain examples of natural communities, rare plant or animal populations, or other significant ecological features that are among the highest quality occurrences of their type in the nation. Comparable (or more significant) sites may occur elsewhere in the nation.

State Significance: Sites considered to contain examples of natural communities, rare plant or animal populations, or other significant ecological features that are among the highest quality occurrences in North Carolina after Nationally-significant examples. There may be comparable (or more significant) sites elsewhere in the nation or the state.

Regional Significance: These sites contain communities or species that are represented elsewhere in the state by better quality examples, but which are among the best examples in their geographic region of the state. The geographic region within which they are considered is based on location and geologic and/or geomorphic similarity.

County Significance: Sites that do not rank of Regional significance, but which contain significant biological resources at the county level. These may include sites with a good example of a fairly common community type, a species that is rare in the state but widespread in other parts of the nation or in neighboring states, or a site that has been greatly reduced from its original quality but which still has significance.

Despite all of the previous work and the efforts of these past two targeted field seasons, large portions of the county remain unexplored, in part because the county is so large, and in part due to lack of access to private property. In some cases of private lands, landowners were not found or did not respond to requests to inventory their property, and a few owners denied permission. Though some areas were not visited simply due to the large area of Transylvania County, an effort has been made to highlight the best examples of its biodiversity.